

Introduction

This document presents design guidelines for the Houston Street historic area in downtown San Antonio. The area has been an important focus of commercial and cultural activity for two centuries. The buildings that stand reflect the efforts of citizens who worked, lived and prospered in the area. Now, entering the twenty-first century, San Antonio anticipates substantial improvements to Houston Street. These guidelines provide a means of preserving Houston Street's heritage while accommodating compatible development and redevelopment.

Policies Underlying the Guidelines

These guidelines seek to help manage change such that the traditional character of the area is respected while accommodating compatible improvements. They reflect the City's goals to promote economic development, enhance the image of the area and reuse its historic resources. The goals outlined in three major planning and preservation documents form the foundation for the design policies that should guide the redevelopment of Houston Street. The goals contained in these documents are discussed below:



Entering the twenty-first century, San Antonio anticipates substantial improvements to Houston Street such as this rehabilitation project to the historic Hotel Savoy building.



Provide design standards for streetscape improvements including appropriate landscaping, furnishings, signage/graphics and pedestrian paths, along with gateways, landmarks and markers at strategic access/transition points.

The Historic Preservation and Urban Design Ordinance #80910, City of San Antonio

This ordinance implements several of the following goals:

- *To preserve, protect and enhance historically, culturally, architecturally and archaeologically significant sites and structures which impart a distinct aspect to the City and serve as visible reminders of the City's culture and heritage;*
- *To recognize, protect and strengthen the unique design character of individual historic districts and individual areas of the City;*
- *To provide a review process for the appropriate preservation and development of important historical, archaeological and cultural resources;*
- *To maintain a generally compatible outward appearance of both historic and modern structures through complimentary scale, form, color, proportion, texture and material;*

Downtown San Antonio, A Strategic Plan for Entering the 21st Century

This plan also provides a clear vision for the downtown area that relates to Houston Street:

"San Antonians acknowledge downtown as the heart of the City and are concerned with its continued enhancement as the center of cultural, historic and civic activity along with government and business. For the most part, they like downtown now, and want to build on its positive elements for the future, so that it grows vibrant, colorful and vital sector of the City."

The following goals apply to the Houston Street historic area revitalization:

- *Create a vibrant mix of activities that promote commercial and cultural development along Houston Street and surrounding area. In addition, to provide additional development activities that relieve pedestrian traffic on the River Walk.*
- *Put residents on the streets and create activity by placing residences in the central area, e.g., adaptive reuse of buildings on Houston Street.*

San Antonio Master Plan Policies

The Master Plan, adopted May 29, 1997, contains a number of goals and policies that apply to Houston Street:

- ***Goal 1: Preserve and enhance the City's urban design.***

Policy 1b: Develop urban design policies and standards which integrate and coordinate planning for historic resources.

- *Preserve and enhance the City's important historic and cultural characteristics, including architectural styles and historic districts, as well as existing residential and commercial districts and neighborhood centers.*
- *Encourage public art in all public and private projects.*
- *Provide design standards for streetscape improvements including appropriate landscaping, furnishings, signage/graphics and pedestrian paths, along with gateways, landmarks and markers at strategic access/transition points.*
- *Develop unique and specific design standards for areas throughout the City, including neighborhoods and the downtown.*

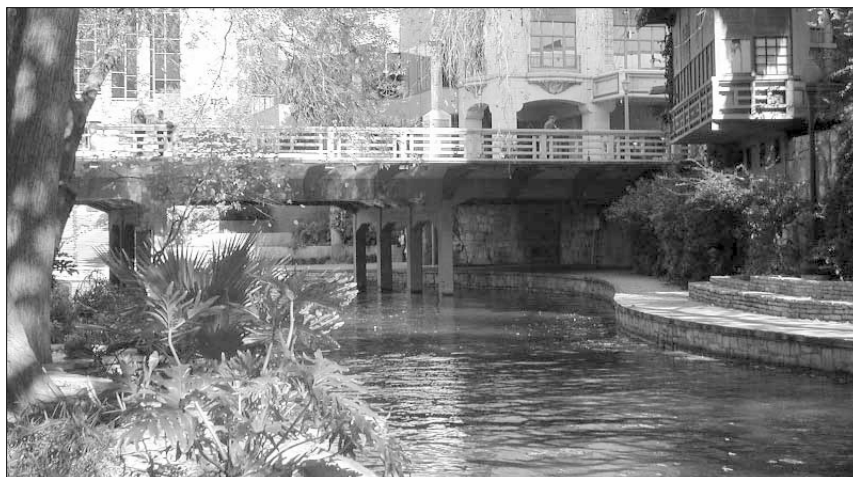
- ***Goal 2: Preserve and enhance the City's historic resources.***

Policy 2b: Actively encourage preservation and renovation as a first priority whenever possible.

Policy 2f: Promote partnerships between public agencies and conservation and neighborhood organizations to achieve preservation objectives.

- ***Goal 5: Develop policies for various transportation modes that will increase access to employment centers...commercial facilities; and decrease the reliance on single occupancy vehicles.***

Policy 5g: Provide additional parking where needed, but ensure that it is integrated into the surrounding environment.



The Chinese Balcony, an important historic resource, overlooks the San Antonio River at the Houston Street bridge crossing.

Overview of the Design Guidelines

Design guidelines define those important features of an established architectural and historical context that should be respected when improvements occur. It is important to note that the guidelines neither dictate taste nor assure good design. Rather, they are intended to be a means for balancing the traditional qualities of the Houston Street historic area with the demands of contemporary use.

The design guidelines provide a basis for making decisions about the appropriate treatment of existing buildings, including historic resources, and the design of compatible new construction. They also serve as educational and planning tools for property owners and their design professionals who seek to make improvements that may affect the character of the Houston Street historic area.

Design guidelines are constructed of the following four components:

1. Design topic

Within each chapter, design guidelines are grouped into pertinent design topics. For example, in the chapter addressing the *Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings*, the subtopic, “Design of Additions,” is among those discussed. Organizing design guidelines into design topic areas allows the user to quickly select the specific design topics within a chapter that are relevant.

A sample design guideline

A typical design guideline in this document contains four components:

First, a **design topic** heading allows the user to quickly select relevant categories of design issues.

Second, the **design guideline** itself is presented as a numbered statement in bold type. This sets forth a basic principle for treatment of a selected design topic.

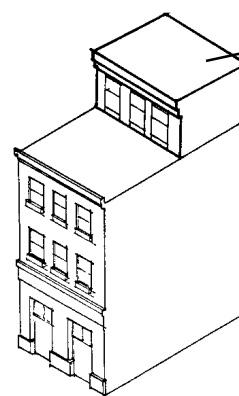
Third, **supplementary requirements and/or information** are listed under the guideline. Preceded by bullets (•), these clarify the primary design guideline statement and may suggest specific methods for complying with it.

Fourth, an **illustration**, in the form of a sketch or photograph, depicts a method of complying with the guideline.

Design of Additions

55. **An addition may be made to the roof of a building if it does the following:**

- An addition should be set back from a primary, character-defining facade, to preserve the perception of the historic scale of the building.



Roof addition set back from the front

2. Design guideline

A specific design guideline is presented as a **bold face** statements under each design topic. They are numbered to indicate their relative position within the chapter and to aid in specific reference in the review process.

3. Supplementary requirements and/or information

Also provided with a design guideline are supplementary requirements, which clarify the primary design guideline statement and may suggest specific methods for complying with it. This may include additional design requirements or may provide an expanded explanation. These statements are listed as bullets (•).

4. Illustrations

Photographs and sketches may also be provided to clarify the intent of a design guideline or its supplementary information.

Basic Principles of Design in the Houston Street Historic Area

There are a number of basic principles of design that are fundamental to the character of the Houston Street historic area and provide the foundation for the design guidelines. Following are these principles:

Principle 1. Maintain a clear definition of the street edge.

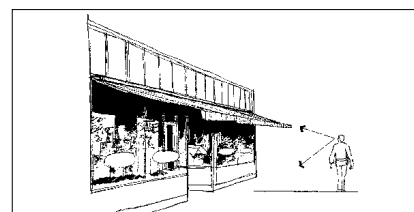
Traditionally, the edge of the sidewalk was clearly defined as a “street wall,” which helped define the street as an urban space. This feature should be maintained.



Maintain a clear definition of the street edge.

Principle 2. Enhance the street level as an inviting place for pedestrians.

Providing features that are visually interesting and that are in human scale is essential. These may include storefront windows, display cases, art and landscaping.



Enhance the street level as an inviting place for pedestrians.

Principle 3. Relate to traditional buildings in the area.

Traditional buildings combine to establish a sense of continuity in the area, while also accommodating variety in design and detail. As properties are improved, they should enhance the overall image of the area as a place to do business. Each building can help contribute to this visual continuity while also meeting an individual owner's needs.



Relate to traditional buildings in the area.



*If the building is a historic structure,
then respect its earlier character.*

Principle 4. If the building is a historic structure, then respect its earlier character.

Preservation of Houston Street's heritage is important to its sense of community and its economic development. Many of the structures on Houston Street have historic value, even some that have experienced alterations. It is important to consider the significance of their character-defining features, including basic forms, materials and details when planning improvements.

Application of the Design Guidelines

Several properties that these design guidelines apply to are also under the jurisdiction of the San Antonio Riverwalk Design Guidelines. These properties will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, in order to determine which specific guidelines apply.